

**Conflict in the Suburbs:  
The Ingush-North Ossetian Conflict over the Prigorodny Raion**

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# Introduction

The conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia over the piece of land called the Prigorodny raion has been characterized different ways. It has fallen into the category of an ethnic conflict and it has fallen into the category of territorial conflict. It certainly involves both, it could be called an ethnic conflict with a territorial component or it could be called a territorial conflict with an ethnic component. Most scholarly works on the subject focus on the history surrounding the conflict going back to the Russian wars in the Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some going back further to explain the historical claims both the Ingush and the Ossetians profess over this territory. They inevitably include the deportations without which this conflict may have never occurred. What I will attempt to do is identify and explore the underlying causes and factors involved in creating this conflict.

I am not attempting to state that the factors I identify caused the conflict or the absence of any one of them would have prevented it. It's impossible to delete or insert certain events and know what the outcome would be. The factors I identify have all been well studied and documented but few have looked at the effects these events have had on the conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia. Through discourse analysis of scholarly works and publications from that time period this thesis will analyze the role each event played in creating the conflict situation.

There are four factors I will explore in the subsequent chapters and I argue these created Ingush-Ossetian conflict. The first has two parts, the border policies of the Soviet Union and the deportations that occurred under Stalin; the second is the power struggle that occurred between Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in the final years of the Soviet Union; the third is the role

of the Chechen declaration of independence and finally the fourth is the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia.

First I will give the history of this region and the key events leading up to the outbreak of violence in October and November 1992. In the subsequent chapters I will deconstruct these four factors and show the role each played in the conflict in the Prigorodny raion.

In October 1992 violence broke out in the Prigorodny raion of North Ossetia between Ingush militias and Ossetian troops. The conflict was over a small piece of land that measures 1,440 square kilometers. Each side put forth claims that this was their “historical homeland” and each side cited unjust actions during the Soviet period that they saw as furthering their claims to this land. The Ingush are a people closely related to the Chechens, both belonging to the Vainakh ethnic group, which are some of the original inhabitants of the Northern Caucasus. After the Russians established control over the area the Ingush were encouraged to move from the mountainous areas and resettle on the plains. The Ossetians are descendants of the Alans who settled in the North Caucasus in the early Middle Ages. Although some converted to Islam, they are still considered a Christian people by the Russians.<sup>1</sup> Their language belongs to the Iranian language group.

Lenin claimed in 1918, “The federation of nations is a stage toward a conscious and closer unity of the workers, who will have learned voluntarily to rise above national conflicts.”<sup>2</sup> He also went to say that he viewed “federation as a stage on the way to voluntary fusion.” The Soviet government thought the people of the Soviet Union would cease to identify on an ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Olga Osipova, “North Ossetia and Ingushetia: The First Clash,” in *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union* ed. Alexei Arbatov et al. (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Helene Carrere d’Encausse, *The Great Challenge, Nationalities and the Bolshevik State 1917-1930* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1992), 114.

level and begin to identify on a class level. The way the internal borders were drawn in the Soviet Union was according to national groups. The Soviet Union itself was established in 1922 as a union of four republics, the Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republics.<sup>3</sup> If Lenin's theory was correct, that ethnic identities would fade away and all Soviet citizens would identify only on a class level, then the administrative border changes would not have had the repercussions they did in the 1980's and 1990's in the Soviet Union and Russia. Stalin believed it was necessary for national cultures to develop and grow before they would merge into the one overarching Soviet culture.<sup>4</sup> For that reason the Soviet government put ethnographic considerations first when drawing borders to further the development of weak tribes and nationalities.<sup>5</sup> As we well know, national identities did not wither away in fact some argue that the structure of the Soviet Union made these national identities stronger. Gerhard Simon states, "Nation building created social forces with demands that did not diminish in time but increased."<sup>6</sup> Although Brezhnev and Gorbachev declared the nationalities question solved, the events that took place as the Soviet Union was crumbling prove them wrong.

Following the civil war in Russia, the government set up the Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic which was comprised of Ossetians, Ingush, Chechens, Balkars, Karachai and Cherkess. The Soviets proceeded to divide up the Mountain Republic and give ethnic groups their own districts or regions. In 1924 the Soviets created the Ingush Autonomous

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 137.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 158.

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 137.

Region which included the Prigorodny raion. Vladikavkaz was made the dual capital of both the Ingush and Ossetian Autonomous Regions. In 1933 the Soviet government made Vladikavkaz the capital exclusively of North Ossetia. The following year, 1934 Ingushetia was merged with Chechnya in the creation of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Region with the capital in Grozny. The Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Region was upgraded to an autonomous republic in 1936, which allowed more autonomy, although this was almost exclusively cultural autonomy.

On February 23, 1944 Soviet soldiers moved into the Chechen-Ingush Republic on Stalin's orders and rounded up every Chechen and Ingush, herded them onto waiting trains and sent them off to be relocated in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Chechen-Ingush Republic was liquidated with much of the land parceled out to neighboring North Ossetia, Dagestan, Georgia and the Stavropol Krai. What was left was renamed the Grozny District and the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic disappeared from maps as though it had never existed. This is one of the most significant events in the conflict between the Ingush and North Ossetians. The Prigorodny raion was given to North Ossetia and subsequently repopulated by Ossetians that were forcibly relocated to the area. An estimated 26,000 South Ossetians were brought from Georgia to the Prigorodny raion to fill the jobs and houses which had belonged to the deportees.<sup>7</sup>

The forcible relocation of the Ossetians to this area has given them what they see as a just claim to the area. Not only did the Ingush suffer at the hands of the Soviets but the Ossetians did also. I will expand on this more later when I cover the deportations. It is estimated that 83,000 Ingush were exiled with 32,100 of these inhabitants of the Prigorodny raion and a further 2,300 from the city of Vladikavkaz.<sup>8</sup> Those who were forcibly relocated to Central Asia were never to

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<sup>7</sup> John O'Loughlin et al., "The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Eastern Prigorodnyy Rayon, North Ossetia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49:6 (2008): 644.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 643.

be allowed to return to their homelands according to Stalin's orders. The Chechens and Ingush, among other select ethnic groups who were deported, not only had to endure the physical relocation and the hardships endured on the journey, when they arrived they faced "physical deprivation, limitation of civil rights, disintegration of social ties, and suppression of their religion, language and culture."<sup>9</sup>

After Stalin's death some deportees began to return to their former residences. It was not until 1956 that the Soviet government enacted a decree that would legally allow the Chechens and the Ingush to return to their homelands. When they returned they found their former republic had been carved up and no longer existed. It was not until 1957 that the Chechen-Ingush Republic was formally restored. The new borders of this republic differed from the previous borders. Some lands that were formerly a part of the republic were not returned, but this was compensated by different parcels of land being incorporated into the new Chechen-Ingush Republic. The focal point of the war, the Prigorodny raion, remained a part of North Ossetia while three districts of the Stavropol Krai were given to the Chechen-Ingush Republic as compensation. One possible reason for this was to provide an ethnic balance in the republic. These new territories were predominately inhabited by Russians so by including them in the Chechen-Ingush Republic the government was able to offset the numbers of returning Chechens and Ingush.

The Soviet government was also faced with another issue: the Prigorodny raion. Stalin had ordered the relocation of Ossetians from South Ossetia with the full intention of not letting the Ingush return. As I stated above under Stalin their deportation to Central Asia was permanent. This certainly presented a potential problem to the Soviet government. The

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<sup>9</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 168.

returning Ingush wanted to return to their former residences, but these were now occupied by Ossetians. Whether right or wrong, the Soviet government chose to leave the South Ossetians in the Prigorodny raion and hope to avoid a conflict by leaving the raion in the jurisdiction of North Ossetia. This was not a viable option for the Ingush. Many Ingush did attempt and succeed in regaining possession of their former residences in the Prigorodny raion although the local authorities attempted to deter them. Valery Tishkov states that these discriminatory actions were “actually a continuation of hidden repression, a renunciation of the rehabilitation.”<sup>10</sup> Apparently the Soviet government was so afraid of ethnic tensions in the Prigorodny raion that an additional 22,000 Ossetians were resettled in the area between the years 1956 and 1959.<sup>11</sup>

The lands that the Chechen-Ingush Republic was compensated with did not deter the returnees from attempting to return to their former homes. This new land was not where their former homes were located and was not their ‘historical homeland,’ they saw the Prigorodny raion as this. In fact, there were at least four demonstrations in the 1970’s by the Ingush against the North Ossetian authorities for the return of the Prigorodny raion. The territory remained a part of North Ossetia and the authorities made it even more difficult for the Ingush to legally obtain land in the Prigorodny Raion when a decree was issued that restricted the amount of residence permits to be issued for the raion. In the period between 1982 and 1992 only 1,000 Ingush were issued residence permits.<sup>12</sup>

Other than being the Ingush ‘historical homeland’ and the ‘cradle of their civilization,’ did this piece of land have any other significance? Yes it did, it boasted the most fertile land in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>11</sup> John O’Loughlin et al., “The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Eastern Prigorodnyy Rayon, North Ossetia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49:6 (2008): 644.

<sup>12</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 169.



the area and a number of industries were located there. Tishkov states, “For North Ossetia, the withdrawal of part of the Prigorodny raion from their control meant the loss of the most important portion of the agrarian complex. For the Ingush, it was quite impossible to create a republic with a sustainable economy without this territory.”<sup>13</sup> The capital of the Chechen-Ingush Republic was Grozny, which was traditionally the capital of Chechnya. In the Ingush part of the republic there was no major city that could serve as a capital or center of a republic. While they were a part of the Chechen-Ingush Republic this was not an issue, but when they became a republic independent of Chechnya, they had no city to serve as their capital. As we will see this was one of the many reasons the Ingush put forward in their fight to regain the Prigorodny raion.

In the late 1980’s the population of this raion had increased dramatically and it became the most densely populated area in North Ossetia. Tishkov states that more than 75,500 people were living in 1,440 square kilometers.<sup>14</sup> In 1989 Kh. A. Fargiyev, a deputy in the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies brought the issue of creating an Ingush Republic before the Congress. In his presentation he asked for full legal rehabilitation of the deported peoples and also stated that without the creation of an autonomous Ingush Republic the Ingush believed that their further cultural, political and economic development was impossible.<sup>15</sup> Later that year in November, 1989 the USSR Supreme Soviet issued a declaration acknowledging that those people violently resettled by Stalin suffered from illegal and criminal actions. In response to this, fearing Ingush would attempt to move back to their former homes, the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet passed a resolution in 1990 that prohibited selling and purchasing houses and buildings as personal property.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 169-170.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>15</sup> “The Congress of USSR People’s Deputies, Verbatim Report,” *Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 24:41 (July 12, 1989), 17.

As of that time the government had made no attempt to return the Prigorodny raion to the Ingush. In 1991 that changed, on April 26, 1991, the Russian Congress of People's Deputies passed the Law on Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples which not only recognized the wrongs of Stalin's actions but stated that the borders should return to where they were before the deportations. This added another aspect to the conflict; it gave the Ingush a legal right to those lands they lost when they were deported. These factors set the stage for the events that led up to the outbreak of violence between Ingush and Ossetian militias in 1992.

## Ethnic Conflicts

Ethnic conflicts are not simple to define or even understand. The factors that lead groups to engage in violent conflict have been studied, listed and debated. Similar factors that exist in two different situations do not always lead to the same conclusion. The theory of “ancient hatreds” put forth often in the media has been shown to hold little or no credibility. Michael E. Brown states the theory that holds “ancient hatreds” and deep seated animosities came to the fore with the collapse of communism alone simply cannot explain why violent conflicts have broke out.<sup>16</sup> This holds true in the conflict that exists between North Ossetia and Ingushetia. In order understand this it is necessary to look at the bigger picture, to look at the conflict in the context of the region, the Caucasus, the history of the area, and the actors who participated. Looking at the context of the region it can be questioned why the violence occurred. The Ingush have not had jurisdiction over the contested piece of land since 1944, so what were the reasons that violence occurred when it did in 1992?

First we must look at some theories of ethnic conflicts and underlying causes for these conflicts. There is some agreement among the factors that contribute to the likelihood of violent conflict. Christoph Zurcher lists six factors that increase a society’s risk of internal war: a low level of economic development; a weak state or the collapse of the state; there must be opportunities to finance the conflict; if a region or country was recently at war there is a high risk of returning to conflict; a complex ethnic geography; and mountainous terrain.<sup>17</sup> When put in the context of the conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia not all of these factors are present.

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<sup>16</sup> Michael E. Brown, “The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Michael E. Brown, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 4-5.

The recent collapse of the Soviet Union which allowed the Ingush to voice their grievances over the Prigorodny raion in a way that was not permitted under the Soviet government certainly contributed to the conflict. The Ingush did not have the resources to finance a protracted war over this piece of land and the violence was subsequently put down when the Russian government troops stepped in and violent conflict has not returned to the area since 1992.

Michael E. Brown cites four sets of factors that have been singled out as underlying factors that contribute to conflict or why some situations are more predisposed to conflict. He states the following factors: structural, political, economic and social, and cultural and perceptual.<sup>18</sup> When applying this to the Ingush-Ossetian conflict some, but not all of these factors were present and can help explain the escalation to violence.

The structural factors include weak states, intrastate security concerns and ethnic geography. The weakness of the Soviet Union and the ensuing power struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin I will argue is one of the major factors for this conflict and I will analyze that further in a later chapter. Intrastate security concerns or a security dilemma could not develop here due to the lack of access to arms on the Ingush side. According to Valery Tishkov the Russian government delivered armored personnel carriers, tanks and machine guns to the Ossetian side to arm the illegal ‘people’s militia’ of North Ossetia.<sup>19</sup> Due to lack of resources there was not a similar build up of weapons on the Ingush side. The ethnic geography of the area is a factor, but it is a factor due to the Soviet government’s border manipulations and the deportations which I will look at in a later chapter.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael E. Brown, “The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Michael E. Brown, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 4-5

<sup>19</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 176-178.

The political factors include discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, and intergroup politics. Although there were no discriminatory political institutions in the Soviet Union, none that held up one ethnic group over another, the allocations of positions of power could be seen as discriminatory against the Ingush, whether intentional or not. In the Prigorodny raion only five of the 53 leading positions in party and soviet organizations were occupied by Ingush.<sup>20</sup> The top positions in the Chechen-Ingush Republic were occupied by Chechens and Russians although the Ingush were one of the titular majorities in the republic. The Soviet Union did not have an exclusionary ideology but the deportations that took place under Stalin certainly had an exclusionary and discriminatory tone. For the Ingush, although they were rehabilitated, they were never given the land back that they claim is rightfully theirs. The restrictions placed on residence permits in the Prigorodny raion could be seen as discriminatory against the Ingush also.

The economic and social factors include economic problems, discriminatory economic systems and economic development. Of these factors the only one that could be applied to the Ingush is economic problems. When Chechnya declared independence, this left the Ingush without major industrial enterprises as well as administrative and cultural centers that remained on the territory of Chechnya.<sup>21</sup> This was not imposed by the Russian, Soviet or Ossetian authorities but it did increase their need for the Prigorodny raion which included the right bank of Vladikavkaz and the industries located there.

The final factor, cultural and perceptual, includes patterns of cultural discrimination and problematic group histories. Again the Ossetians were not responsible for the discriminatory

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 160

<sup>21</sup> Leokadia Drobizheva, *Ethnic Conflict in the Post Soviet World: Case Studies and Analysis* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996), 211.

acts under Stalin, but as the group who inhabited their former territory, they were seen as the enemy in this conflict. The Ossetians lived in the Prigorodny raion and they had administrative control over the region which meant they could control who received residence permits. The problematic history between the two groups stems directly from the deportations and border changes subsequently made by the Soviet government.

These highlight underlying factors in a conflict, but what contributes to the onset of violence? Michael E. Brown states four factors that can trigger internal conflicts: internal, mass level factors such as problematic ethnic geography and patterns of discrimination; external, mass level factors such as a sudden influx of refugees; external, elite level factors such as discrete, deliberate decisions by a government to trigger conflicts in nearby areas for purposes of their own; and internal, elite level factors such as power struggles and ideological contests over how a country should be run.<sup>22</sup> Several of these factors were present in the conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia. As I stated earlier the ethnic geography of the region was a factor in the conflict and there was a sudden influx of South Ossetian refugees. There are also theories that the Russian government armed the North Ossetians and promoted initiating violence against the Ingush hoping the Chechens would take up arms to defend the Ingush. According to Brown's trigger factors, at least two of the factors were present that could account for the escalation to violence in the region. I don't count the theory of the involvement of the Russian government because it is not proven.

Jan Koehler and Christoph Zurcher list four factors that are more specific in that they relate exclusively to the emergence of violence in the former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus region: state weakness; cheap and readily available weapons; presence of risk-increasing factors;

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<sup>22</sup> Michael E. Brown, "The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview," in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Michael E. Brown, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 15-16.

and the legacy of ethno-territorial units. In many of the conflicts that have broken out in the waning years of the Soviet Union and after its fall these have contributed to the occurrence of violence. The situation between Ingushetia and North Ossetia has many other factors involved.

Yes, the weakness of the Soviet Union was a factor; and the ethno-territorial units the Soviet government imposed on the area are a definitive factor of this conflict. However there were no readily available weapons, unlike the Union Republics that had Soviet military installations that became their property after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ingushetia and North Ossetia did not possess these. As stated above North Ossetia was given weapons by the Russian military but this was not enough to fight a protracted war. This could be a reason the conflict was so short lived.

The complex ethnic makeup of the North Caucasus was a factor in many of the conflicts which broke out in the area in the last days of the Soviet Union and after its collapse. The ethnic makeup of Prigorodny raion is one of the main factors in what drove the two sides to conflict. It is one of the most densely populated areas in Russia that, before the conflict, was inhabited by Ingush, North Ossetians and South Ossetians which played a major role in igniting the violence. Stefan Wolff argues that, “Violence does not spontaneously erupt between otherwise peacefully coexisting ethnic groups.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to say that most often there are other factors that cause violence such as power and material gain. This is visible in the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. Each side did not form militias and take up arms because of an ancient hatred, they did so because each saw the other as a compromising their right to inhabit and control the Prigorodny raion. Wolff also states that, “Although there are some general trends and commonalities that cut across a whole range of different conflicts, it is often very specific local dynamics that provide the key

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<sup>23</sup> Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

to understanding a particular conflict.”<sup>24</sup> This is exactly the case in the conflict over the Prigorodny raion.

For the Ingush, they saw the Ossetians as standing in the way of the return of their historic homeland. They feel the land had been unfairly taken away from them after the deportations and never returned. The Ossetians claim they were forcibly resettled on the area and they should not have to suffer another injustice of being forcibly removed. The Ossetians also claim that their historic homeland lies in the Prigorodny Raion.

This conflict was unique in the fact that there was no secession movement. In the other conflicts in the Caucasus most often secession was the goal: Chechnya wanted independence from Russia; South Ossetia wanted independence from Georgia in order to join Russia and be united with North Ossetia; Abkhazia wanted independence from Georgia and Nagorno Karabakh wanted to secede from Azerbaijan in order to join Armenia. This alone sets the Ingush-Ossetian conflict apart from the others in the region. Their fight was over internal administrative borders and ultimately the right for the Ingush to reclaim the homes and property they lost due to the deportations.

Of the factors identified that contribute to ethnic conflict, only some were present when the conflict broke out between Ingushetia and North Ossetia. What then caused the conflict to escalate to violence in October 1992? I have identified four major factors that contributed to this: the ethno-territorial system put in place by the Soviet government and subsequent border changes that put in place hostilities that came to the surface with the advent of glasnost in the Gorbachev era. The secession of Chechnya from Russia which then left the Ingush without territory and much of the infrastructure they saw necessary for an autonomous republic. This in

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.



turn increased their demand for the return of the contested land. The influx of refugees from the conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia of which many settled in the Prigorodny raion added to the tension in the area. Whether they were settled there by the North Ossetian government as some scholars claim or whether they went there for other reasons is something I will explore in a later chapter. The last factor I identify as contributing to the outbreak of violence is the power struggle that existed between Gorbachev and Yeltsin and the laws passed by the Soviet government and Russian government. The Soviet government, under Gorbachev, passed a law recognizing that the deportations were criminal but did not restore land rights or borders to where they stood prior to the deportations. The Russian government, under Yeltsin, did just this. It restored the borders to where they were before the deportations which would have given the Prigorodny raion back to the Ingush. This law did not address how this was to be done or what to do about the fact that this area was now inhabited by Ossetians. The first factor and what I identify as the foundation of this conflict is the border policies of the Soviet Union and the deportations that occurred under Stalin.

## The Soviet Nationalities Policy and the Deportations

On November 15, 1917 the Bolshevik Party published the “Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia,” and in this again they vowed their commitment to self-determination by stating, “The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state.”<sup>25</sup> Lenin himself placed three reservations on his liberal policy of self-determination. “First, the interests of the proletariat and of the proletarian class struggle would always be paramount.”<sup>26</sup> Second, he thought that if a nation did not wish to secede, it could not have any autonomy at all. He was opposed to a federal arrangement for the country. Third he saw democratic centralism as binding on all parts of the Bolshevik Party regardless of their national origin.<sup>27</sup> These conditions radically altered self-determination that the Bolsheviks were willing to allow the national minorities of Russia.

While the Bolshevik Party was fighting the Civil War they allowed certain measures of autonomy or even independence in some of the borderlands of Russia. One example of this was the treaty signed with Georgia in 1920 that recognized Georgian independence.<sup>28</sup> They allowed this so they could turn their attention and troops to a Polish invasion. When the Bolsheviks could once again focus on the Caucasus and had the military power at their disposal they

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<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Illych Lenin, *A Documentary History of Communism*, ed. Robert V. Daniels (London: I.B.Tairis & Co Ltd, 1985). Accessed online at <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/history//ussr/government/1917/11/02.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Ben Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1997), 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967), 24.

marched into Tbilisi ten months after the treaty had been signed and established a Soviet regime in Georgia.<sup>29</sup>

As Stephen Ratner states, “Numerous states have created, abolished and redrawn internal boundaries in the course of the nation-building process. The drawing of such lines fosters unity in several ways based on the state’s particular objectives. These goals are precisely those that drive the devolution of power to or its sharing with sub state entities in the first place – political, administrative and economic.”<sup>30</sup> The Soviets did redraw their internal borders, but not to foster unity as Ratner states. The Soviets did exactly the opposite in some areas creating pockets of ethnic minorities in republics. The Soviet government did this to avoid an uprisings and possible secessions among ethnic groups, especially those who had their own ethno-territories. Their policy of creating animosity among ethnic groups has been called “divide and rule.”

With secession and independence no longer a viable option for the national minorities in the Russian state the government formed a federation. Prior to 1917 Lenin was vehemently opposed to any type of federation, in fact in 1913 he stated, “We are against federation on principle – it weakens economic ties; it is a pattern unfit for a single State.”<sup>31</sup> The reason for this change of opinion was the state that the Bolsheviks inherited after the Revolution. They took over a country that, “at the time of the October Revolution a number of the nationalities of Russia were actually in a state of complete secession and complete isolation from one another, and, in view of this, federation represented a step forward from the division of the working

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen R. Ratner, “Drawing a Better Line: Uti Possidetis and the Borders of New States,” *American Journal of International Law* 90:4 (October 1996): 603.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967), 25.

masses of the nationalities to their closer union, their amalgamation.”<sup>32</sup> They looked at a federation as an answer to their national problem. The Bolsheviks believed that the differences in nationalities would wither away and a merging of them would occur so a federation would be the ideal solution during the interim period of merging.

The way the internal borders were drawn in the Soviet Union was according to national groups. The Soviet Union itself was established in 1922 as a union of four republics, the Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republics.<sup>33</sup> Within the Russian Republic there were autonomous soviet socialist republics, autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs.<sup>34</sup> The borders of these areas were drawn with national minorities in mind. The areas were named after ethnic minorities that the territory was assigned to. “By applying the concept of self-determination within a federation system, the Soviet authorities created a state substructure comprised of numerous autonomous territories derived on the basis of nationality.”<sup>35</sup>

The Soviet officials drew the borders to contain nationalities as well as they could. The first census administered in the Soviet Union was completed in 1926. The Soviet government ordered a study of the results and for ethnographers to redraw the internal borders of the autonomous regions of the Russian republic to achieve the most homogenous unit possible.<sup>36</sup>

What the study found was only 11.4 per cent of border districts would have to be transferred to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Allan Kagedan, “Territorial Units as Nationality Policy,” in *Soviet Nationality Policies, Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London: Mansell, 1990), 166.

<sup>35</sup> Lee Schwartz, “Regional Population Redistribution and National Homelands in the USSR,” in *Soviet Nationality Policies, Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London: Mansell, 1990), 127.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 135.

increase the level of concentration of the titular group.<sup>37</sup> The results of this study show that the Soviet government had done an accurate job of delineating the internal borders.

The one major problem with this study was that it only looked at contiguous borders. Therefore the Nagorno-Karabakh oblast in Azerbaijan, which had an Armenian majority, was not taken into account because it did not share any borders with Armenia. This was similar with the Nakichevan oblast in Armenia, which had an Azeri majority but did not share any borders with Azerbaijan.

The Soviet government believed the individuals living in these areas would eventually lose their ethnic identity and view themselves and each other according to class. Eventually these boundaries would become less important and eventually vanish. Instead “many nationalities became demographically more consolidated within their ‘homelands,’ acquired effective and articulate national political and intellectual elite, and developed a shared national consciousness.”<sup>38</sup> Before I look at the effects of the Soviet policy of creating national homelands I will first look at how these nationalities were decided upon and what the criteria were for being assigned a national homeland. I will show that in many cases the Soviet government reified nations by assigning a nationality to every. The national identities that were given such importance played a major part in some of the conflicts that evolved during the last years of the Soviet Union.

In her book *Empire of Nations* Francine Hirsch argues the Soviet officials pursued a path of “state-sponsored evolution” concerning the nationalities. She claims ethnographers helped the government decide which clans and tribes would fuse together to create new nationalities.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald Gregor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past, Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 125.

“Ethnographers, along with local elites, then worked along with the Soviet government to create national territories and official national languages and cultures for these groups. State-sponsored evolutionism was thus premised on the belief that ‘primordial’ ethnic groups were the building blocks of nationalities *and* on the assumption that the state could intervene in the natural process of development and ‘construct’ modern nations.”<sup>39</sup>

The reason she puts forward for the government policy of state-sponsored evolution is the government was attempting “to usher the *entire* population through the Marxist timeline of historical development: to transform feudal-era clans and tribes into nationalities, and nationalities into socialist-era nations – which, at some point in the future, would merge together under communism.”<sup>40</sup>

In the end there was no fusion so there were national groups that were given a piece of land tied to them by name. Attempts at altering the borders of these autonomous regions created animosity between the competing ethnic groups. One such example is the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. They each lay claims to a piece of land that at different times belonged to each of them.

The 1926 census was the first census administered by the Soviets that attempted to record the nationality of every Soviet citizen. There had been previous censuses in 1920 and 1923 but were seen as unreliable due to the circumstances of the civil war.<sup>41</sup> The 1926 census was conducted by the Commission for the Study of Tribal Composition and through the census they were to decide everyone’s ethnicity even the “‘backward’ peoples (individuals and entire groups) lacking national consciousness. In order to classify the people the census takers had to agree upon a way to assign nationality to those who did not know. Some scientists advocated a

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<sup>39</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations, Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

formula that used to religion, language and anthropological type where others believed nationality should be a “reflection of group consciousness.”<sup>42</sup> In the end they decided upon a system of asking the person directly to identify his or her nationality, the census taker recorded that and also asked supplemental questions which varied by region. For example religion was seen as important in Turkestan because that could help distinguish between nationalities, as Tajiks were Sunni and Iranians were Shiites.<sup>43</sup> People who had previously identified on clan or tribal levels but not as a member of a nation were given a nationality which was decided upon using the supplemental questions each census taker had.

This is important because prior to incorporation into the Soviet Union, many of the people of the Caucasus identified not as a Chechen or an Ingush or a Balkar, but they identified along clan or family lines. There was no overarching ethnic identity until it was assigned to them by the Soviet government. When Chechnya demanded independence from Russia, it was the first time there was a movement in the name of the Chechen people.

Nationality was not capable of “withering away” in the Soviet Union because the government placed a great importance on it. Certain nationalities were seen as loyal while other were seen as traitors and untrustworthy. This was evident in the deportations that took place in the Caucasus during World War II. The internal passport system was introduced in 1932, but an NKVD passport decree that went into effect in April 1938, national self-definition was circumscribed. A person could no longer declare his or her own nationality; it was to be decided according to the nationality of the person’s parents and was recorded in his or her internal passport.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 112-3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 275.

All the time the Soviet government was promoting this fusion of nations they never made it possible to occur. Soviet citizens were never allowed to escape their nationality with it being stamped in their passport. Unlike in Yugoslavia, where citizens had the option of declaring a Yugoslav identity, there was no such option in the Soviet Union. No one had the option to declare himself or herself “Soviet” in his or her passport. While the government was waiting for the national identity to wither away, it could not because Soviet citizens were constantly reminded of their nationality, whether this be through their ethno-territory or the nationality entry in their passports. The Soviet Union succeeded only half way along their path to the merger of nations and the emergence of people who identify only as a class. They allowed, in fact encouraged, nations to flourish but the rest of the scenario did not play out.

When the Soviet Union broke apart it seemed natural that the Union republics become independent nations. The only problem was deciding which autonomous areas would receive independence and which would not. One problem Ratner identifies with creating strong national identities in a multi-national state and delineating borders along those national lines is that these autonomous regions “could come to regard them almost as if they were international ones.”<sup>45</sup> As Ronald Grigor Suny claims, “nation-making in the USSR occurred within a unique context: a state that had set out to overcome nationalism and the differences between nations had in fact created a set of institutions and initiated processes that fostered the development of conscious, secular, politically mobilizable nationalities.”<sup>46</sup>

The other part of this factor is the deportations that took place under Stalin. On February 23, 1944, the entire Ingush and Chechen populations were rounded up and sent by train to

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<sup>45</sup> Stephen R. Ratner, “Drawing a Better Line: Uti Possidetis and the Borders of New States,” *American Journal of International Law* 90:4 (October 1996): 605.

<sup>46</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past, Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 126.



Central Asia. The reason given for this was collaboration with the Nazis during the World War II. There are two major problems with this reason, first the Nazis never fully occupied the territory of the Chechen-Ingush Republic. The second is that even if there were some individuals who did cooperate and fight on the side of the Germans, punishing an entire population for acts of certain individuals is ludicrous. The true reason for why specific ethnic groups were deported may never be known. In fact, the reasoning behind many of Stalin's order and decisions is unclear. I am not focusing on why Stalin chose to deport the Ingush, but merely the role it played in creating the conflict between them and the Ossetians. After the Ingush were rehabilitated in 1957, they were not given back all of the land they had previously occupied. This is how the deportations affected the conflict: it created a contested piece of land around which the conflict was centered in 1992.

The most important part of the Soviet nationality policy was that if it had gone according to plan, the border changes that were made after the deportations would not have had any affect. All citizens of the Soviet Union were to identify themselves as Soviet citizens, they were not to see ethnicity as it was supposed to wither away. The fact that it did not means that those border changes made after the deportations, the land that was given to other ethno-territories, remained a point of contention especially for the Ingush.

The way the leaders of the Soviet Union drew the internal borders and their theory on nationality, coupled with the deportations that took place in 1944, lays the foundation for the conflict that would ensue between the Ingush and Ossetians. This is the first factor in the four factors I identify as creating this conflict.

## The Chechen-Ingush Divorce

The most obvious part of this conflict is that it is over a specific piece of land. What is not obvious or apparent are the reasons why the Ingush see this land as necessary for their survival. In her book, Monica Duffy Toft looks at why some ethnic disputes become violent and why others do not. She looks at the indivisibility of territory in understanding violent ethnic conflicts.<sup>47</sup> In her theory violence is likely if the ethnic minority demands sovereignty over the territory it occupies and if the state is unwilling to allow this, if the state considers the territory as indivisible from rest of the state. The contested territory is seen as vital to both groups, the ethnic group and the state; each believes their survival depends on it. Ethnic groups often see a particular piece of territory as a defining attribute of their identity, without which they may cease to exist as a distinct group. States are bound by borders, and any attempt to change those borders can be seen as a threat to the survival of the state.<sup>48</sup> In the case of Ingushetia and North Ossetia, each claims the Prigorodny Raion as vital to their survival; each claims it was the historical homeland of their people. North Ossetia is unwilling to cede any of the territory and Ingushetia is unwilling to renege on their demands that the territory be transferred. Although this is not a case of secession from a larger state, the indivisibility of the territory is still evident. What is being fought over is administrative borders within the Russian Federation.

Valery Tishkov looks at a sociological approach to ethnic conflict and puts forth the theory that certain aspects of behavioral psychology and socio-psychological mechanisms play a more significant role than previously believed. He states, “We have enough evidence to prove that groups with diminished status and who are subject to discrimination in dominated

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<sup>47</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

environments quite often express fears for their own existence, even when objective demographic, political, or cultural conditions would normally not lead to conclusions.”<sup>49</sup> He also discusses the symbolic meaning territory can have for an ethnic group, in agreement with Toft. The struggle for territory to some ethnic groups is from the symbolic meaning of the land rather than pragmatic interests.<sup>50</sup> This is visible in the case of Ingushetia, after their rehabilitation by the Soviet government and the Checheno-Ingush Republic reinstated, they were compensated with extra land in the northern portion of the republic for the Prigorodny raion which was not returned. This extra land had no meaning for the Ingush; they did not see it as a part of their historical homeland. So to them it did not counterbalance loss of the Prigorodny raion.

Anthony Smith puts forth the term *ethnicism* to describe a more collective movement “whose activities and efforts are aimed at resisting perceived threats from outside and corrosion within, at renewing a community’s forms and traditions, and at reintegrating a community’s members and strata which have become dangerously divided by conflicting pressures.”<sup>51</sup> He goes on to say that these ethnicist movements are usually found when a backward society changed due to a more developed society.<sup>52</sup> This bears some resemblance to what has taken place in Ingushetia. Due to Russian and then Soviet expansion the Ingush people were given a territory, a nationality under the Soviet system, and borders that were changed more than once by the government. In addition, their nationality was demonized when they as a people were charged *en masse* with collaboration with the Nazis and subsequently deported. This

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<sup>49</sup> Valery Tishkov, “Ethnic Conflicts in the Context of Social Science Theories,” in *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe and Valery Tishkov (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1996), 65.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1988), 50.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 50.

demonization was something that came to be a part of their identity and has given importance to the return of this contested piece of land. They see this piece of land as the land that gave the Ingush their name and as their historic homeland, without this piece of land they see themselves as a defeated people. This piece of land was taken away from them when they were deported, as a way to make this wrong right, they want this land back. The return of this land is tied to the demoralization of the deportations.

There are other factors involved in regaining control of the Prigorodny raion for the Ingush and the next is their situation with Chechnya. As stated above Chechnya and Ingushetia “shared” a republic prior to the deportations and once again when it was reinstated in 1957. There are several aspects I will look at which caused the Ingush to create an autonomous republic in Russia independent of Chechnya. First I will look the role the Ingush played in the leadership in the Chechen-Ingush Republic after it was reinstated in 1957. Second, how the lack of representation in the government of the republic, especially after Dzhokar Dudayev and the Chechen National Congress came to power in 1991 forced the Ingush to create their own republic in Russia. The creation of their own republic brought the issue of borders to the fore and because it was lacking a real capital city, which they had in Grozny when they were a part of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, this only added more urgency in their fight for the Prigorodny raion and Vladikavkaz, which had served as the capital of the Ingush Republic in the 1930’s.

In both the Chechen-Ingush Republic and North Ossetia the Ingush were the third largest ethnic group but they were underrepresented in each republic. The most powerful government and party positions were held by Chechens and Russians in the Chechen-Ingush Republic and by Ossetians in North Ossetia. Valery Tishkov claims the Ingush “have lived with a humble status

in the political and socio-economic spheres.”<sup>53</sup> The Ingush did occupy the majority of government positions in the administrative units which were inhabited by a majority of Ingush. This did not make up for the fact that the true seats of power – the republican leadership – which brought with it access to the distribution of money and goods from the center, were occupied by Chechens and Russians in the Chechen-Ingush Republic and Ossetians in North Ossetia.

This coupled with the feelings of being second class citizens in the Soviet Union, especially with regard to the restrictions the Ingush faced when attempting to return to their former homes in the Prigorodny Raion, has strengthened their resolve to obtain control over this piece of land. They see themselves as having lived in republics dominated by other ethnic groups while they were put in a subordinate or second class position and this has fuelled the need to create an autonomous republic in Russia that was independent of Chechnya and North Ossetia.

The lack of representation in the upper levels of the party and government in the Chechen-Ingush Republic was not the only reason the Ingush wanted their own republic. When the leadership of the Chechen-Ingush Republic declared it a sovereign state and began on a path to declaring independence from Russia, the leadership paid little attention to the Ingush minority in their republic. The Ingush were in a republic that did not take them into consideration. Dzhokar Dudayev declared Chechnya independent before the creation of the Republic of Ingushetia leaving the Ingush with no proper government, no representation and no choice in the future of the republic they were still technically a part of.

The Chechen National Congress, which was established in November 1990 declared the sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic the same month. The following year, in August 1991 Dudayev took control of the television station and established a national guard. In

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<sup>53</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 160.

September 1991 the Chechen National Congress (CNC) passed a resolution transferring power in the republic to the executive committee of the CNC which Dudayev was chairman of.<sup>54</sup> Again the republican leadership was concentrated in the hands of Chechens who paid little attention to the Ingush. Two groups formed on the Ingush side, one group was for the creation of an Ingush republic which would remain a part of Russia and the other was for preserving the Chechen-Ingush Republic but, again remaining a part of Russia.

In 1991 when Dudayev was elected president of the republic the Ingush did not even participate in the election.<sup>55</sup> It wasn't until after this election that the Ingush held a referendum on the creation of an Ingush Republic within Russia. 92.5 percent of voters voted in favor remaining a part of Russia.<sup>56</sup> Creating a republic for Ingushetia was not nearly as simple as holding a referendum and then passing a law creating it. The issue of borders loomed very large in the creation of Ingushetia. In addition to the territorial dispute with North Ossetia over the Prigorodny raion, Ingushetia was facing a territory dispute with Chechnya over several regions. When Ingushetia was finally created as an autonomous republic in Russia, it did not have formally delineated borders. The borders issues between Chechnya and Ingushetia stem from the borders drawn by the Soviets just as in the conflict over the Prigorodny raion. In 1989 the Ingush listed the Sunja Raion, which was one of the territories claimed by both sides as officially

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<sup>54</sup> Amjad M. Jaimoukha, *The Chechens: A Handbook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 63.

<sup>55</sup> Marta-Lisa Magnusson, "The Failure of Conflict Prevention and Management: The Case of Chechnya Part 1: Conflict Assessment and Pre-War Escalation," in *Conflict and Forced Displacement in the Caucasus: Perspectives, Challenges and Responses*, ed. Tom Trier and Lars Funch Hansen (Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council, 1999), accessed at: <http://www.caucasus.dk/publication3.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> Ali Kazikhanov, "92.5% Cast Their Votes for a Sovereign Ingushetia," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 49:43 (January 8, 1992): 22.

a part of the Ingush Republic.<sup>57</sup> The Chechens also claimed this piece of land as a part of Chechen territory. The Ingush were facing two different republics on each side that were making claims on what the Ingush saw as Ingush territory. Facing the prospect of losing territory to Chechnya, this increased their need for the Prigorodny raion.

Before the referendum on the creation of an autonomous Ingush Republic was held there was one group of Ingush who promoted the idea of a unified Chechen-Ingush Republic within Russia. This was in opposition to what the leadership of the republic wanted. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union Dudayev and the CNC wanted the creation of a sovereign Chechen Republic outside the RSFSR, they wanted the same rights as the other 15 union republics.<sup>58</sup> They did not want to remain a part of Russia. The Ingush in effect were left with no real choice other than becoming an autonomous region within Russia. They believed that if they remained a part of Chechnya which was vowing to separate from Russia they would be forfeiting their chance to regain control of the Prigorodny Raion. When Russia passed the law which should have restored the pre-deportation borders they were given hope that the land would be returned. If they remained a part of Chechnya not only would they not regain the lost territory they would also be a part of a republic where the leadership was again filled by Chechens. Their best hope for fulfilling their wishes was the creation of an Ingush Republic in Russia although there was a movement among the Ingush to keep the republic united. With Dudayev holding the real power in the republic, remaining with Chechnya was not an option. In order to get their land back they believed they had to remain a part of Russia, but by separating from Chechnya they

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<sup>57</sup> Victor A. Shnirelman, "The Orstkhoy Revival: Identity and Border Dispute in the Northern Caucasus," in *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post Soviet Disorder*, ed. Moshe Ganner (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 140.

<sup>58</sup> Timur Muzayev, "Checheno-Ingushetia: Dzhokar Dudayev Agrees to a Dialogue. Chechen National Congress Guardsmen Return to Barracks," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 42:43 (November 1991): 14.

faced losing more territory, the Sunja Raion, which then increased their resolve to regain the Prigorodny raion.

In most scholarly discourse about the war in Chechnya, the fact that Ingushetia was still technically a part of the republic is not addressed. When the subject of Chechnya and the movement for first sovereignty and then independence is written about, Ingushetia seems not to even be a part of the Chechen-Ingush Republic although it was until the creation of the Ingush Republic in 1992. In the Soviet and post-Soviet press the republic is still called the Chechen-Ingush Republic and the Ingush movement for the preservation of the Chechen-Ingush Republic is addressed. This of course reflects the newspapers I am citing, they are Russian and Soviet newspapers, the Russian government was for the preservation of the Russian Federation and this is seen in the newspapers. While the Ingush opposition to the Chechen independence movement is largely ignored in discourse about the Chechen war, it was visible in the Russian and post-Soviet press.

On October 21, 1991 *Izvestia*, a Russian newspaper, reported on the situation of the Ingush in the Chechen-Ingush Republic by saying, “The position of the CNC’s executive committee was sharply criticized by representatives of the Ingush People’s Council, who said that they favor a united Chechen-Ingushetia as part of the Russian SFSR and will insist on that, despite the CNC executive committee’s attempt to divide the republic into parts without the consent of the other peoples living therein.”<sup>59</sup>

*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, another Russian newspaper reported on the Ingush dissatisfaction with the Chechen National Congress. “One must also take into consideration the position of the

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<sup>59</sup> Ali Kazikhanov, “Preparations to Fight Are Underway in Grozny. Tension Has Increased Sharply in Checheno-Ingushetia,” *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 42:43 (November 20, 1991): 15.



leaders of the Ingush movement, who recently have been expressing their dissatisfaction with Dudayev's tough course more and more often. Most Ingush favor the preservation of Checheno-Ingushetia as part of the RSFSR."<sup>60</sup>

Valery Tishkov describes the demands of the All-National Congress of the Chechen People which by its name alone does not address the needs or concerns of the Ingush in their own republic, as calling for the restoration of Chechen sovereignty.<sup>61</sup> This ignores the fact that the Ingush were still a part of this republic. Tishkov does address the Ingush when he speaks about the Ingush-Ossetian conflict but when the conflict between Russia and Chechnya is written about, scholars seemingly ignore the fact that Chechnya was not a separate autonomous republic, the Chechens still shared their republic with the Ingush.

The Chechen National Congress, headed by Dudayev did not give the Ingush a voice in the republic. After the failed August putsch in Russia, the Chechen National Congress became the de facto leadership in republic. The leadership was comprised of Chechens and while the Ingush leadership wanted the republic to remain intact as the Chechen-Ingush Republic within Russia, Dudayev was adamantly against remaining a part of Russia. Paula Garb states, "The Ingush carry their own resentments against the Chechens because of the way they were treated when Chechnya drew the border after it declared independence from Russia in 1991 and counted Ingushetia out."<sup>62</sup> The Ingush were left with the choice of remaining in a republic where they

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<sup>60</sup> Timur Muzayev, "Checheno-Ingushetia: Dzhokar Dudayev Agrees to a Dialogue. Chechen National Congress Guardsmen Return to Barracks," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 42:43 (November 1991): 14.

<sup>61</sup> Valery Tishkov, "Explaining and Categorizing the Chechen War," in *Conflicts in the Caucasus*, ed. Pavel Baev and Ole Berthelsen (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1996), 28.

<sup>62</sup> Paula Garb, "Ethnicity, Alliance Building and the Limited Spread of Ethnic Conflict in the Caucasus," in *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion and Escalation*, ed. David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 198.

had no representation in the government or becoming an autonomous republic within Russia. In December 1991 the Ingush overwhelmingly voted to become an autonomous republic within Russia with the hopes that the Prigorodny raion would be returned to them.

The disregard of the Chechen leadership towards the Ingush and their wishes to remain a part of Russia basically pushed the Ingush out of the Chechen-Ingush Republic and into creating their own republic. When the Russian government created the Republic of Ingushetia they were given a republic without formal borders and without a capital city. When the Ingush finally had a republic for themselves they believed the Prigorodny raion would be returned to them as the law passed by the Russian government promised. This law coupled with the feelings of being second class citizens in the Soviet Union and underrepresented in the Chechen-Ingush Republic only added to their determination to regain control of the Prigorodny Raion.

## The Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict

Although this conflict occurred between Ingushetia and North Ossetia, events that happened in South Ossetia prior to the violence in the Prigorodny raion had a direct effect outbreak of fighting. To understand the roots of the South Ossetian factor of this conflict we have to again look back to Soviet history and border policies in the Caucasus.

The main underlying reason to this conflict is the border changes made by the Soviet government while they were in power. Some claim their policies were meant to divide and conquer unruly subjects. By placing minority regions within the boundaries of other republics, such as the Armenian populated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan, this was meant to keep a measure of mistrust among the locals to avoid a collective uprising against the Soviet government. If the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union had played out like it was supposed to according to their ideology, nationalities would have faded away and become irrelevant. This would have meant that many of the conflicts that have taken place within the borders of the former Soviet Union would never have happened. Unfortunately for those caught up these conflicts they were not correct. In fact many believe that the Soviet policies of giving minorities autonomous republics only served to strengthen their national identity. It has been argued that the Chechens never unified under the flag of Chechnya until 1991. Prior to that, loyalties were always with clans and families.

The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast in Georgia was home to just over 100,000 of which 66.2 percent were ethnic Ossetians and 29 percent were Georgians.<sup>63</sup> During the period of the Soviet Union prior to Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika policies relations between the

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<sup>63</sup> Christoph Zurcher, *The Post Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 124.

Georgians and Ossetians were conflict free until the Georgian government passed a law making Georgian the official language of the republic. This caused the South Ossetians along with the Abkhazians to react. In September 1990 the regional South Ossetian Supreme Soviet voted to elevate the status of South Ossetia to that of a Democratic Soviet Republic and voted to stay in the Soviet Union, should Georgia succeed. The Georgian government answered this by abolishing all autonomous areas in their country, thus abolishing South Ossetia; whether as an autonomous oblast or Soviet Republic, the government no longer recognized it. At the same time the Georgian government imposed a state of emergency on South Ossetia.

The Georgian government imposed a blockade on South Ossetia and in January 1991 fighting broke out in Tshkinvali, the capital. Due to the conflict 93 villages, mostly Ossetian, were burned to the ground, almost 1,000 Ossetian civilians were killed in fighting and it created a vast number of refugees.<sup>64</sup> The real number of refugees remains disputed with estimates varying from 40,000 to as high as 100,000, with some of these traveling in between North and South Ossetia.<sup>65</sup>

This had a direct effect on North Ossetia because when South Ossetians fled the fighting, they went to North Ossetia. According to Valery Tishkov, “The influx of large numbers of Ossetian refugees from Georgia after the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict was to pose an additional threat to the Ingush minority status in North Ossetia.”<sup>66</sup> What was the scope of this refugee problem and how did North Ossetia react to it? There are mixed stories on how North Ossetia dealt with this issue, there are reports that these refugees were resettled in the Prigorodny

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<sup>64</sup> Alexei Zverev, “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994,” in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, ed. Bruno Coppeters (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996), 47.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>66</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 163.

raion to increase the Ossetian population in the contested area and reports that the North Ossetian government attempted to send these refugees back to South Ossetia when the fighting had subsided. First I will explore the differing stories and then analyze how this affected the violence that broke out in the Prigorodny raion and what, if any, role the South Ossetians played in this conflict.

The Russian government recognized the destabilizing effect the influx of refugees into North Ossetia could have in the northern Caucasus. In June 1992 the Georgian government forces broke through to Tskinali telling all inhabitants and defenders to leave. The result of this action was that more 80 percent of the homes and administrative buildings were burned down and all important industrial and social facilities were damaged.<sup>67</sup> The Russian government accused the Georgian government of attempting to drive out all of the non-Georgian population and issued a statement warning that the ensuing refugee problem could contribute to the instability in the northern Caucasus.<sup>68</sup> The statement also called for peace talks and several days later the leaders of South Ossetia and Georgia signed a peace treaty after which South Ossetia gained de facto independence.

Olga Osipova claims that most of the nearly 100,000 South Ossetian refugees who fled to North Ossetia found refuge in Vladikavkaz or in the Prigorodny raion.<sup>69</sup> The question is why would the majority of 100,000 refugees flee to the most densely populated area in the republic? For one possible answer we have to again look back to the deportations that occurred in 1944.

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<sup>67</sup> Edward Ozhiganov, "The Republic of Georgia: Conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia," in *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, ed. Alexei Arbatov, et al. (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1997), 362.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>69</sup> Olga Osipova, "North Ossetia and Ingushetia: The First Clash," in *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union* ed. Alexei Arbatov et al. (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1997), 46-47.

After the Ingush were deported and the Prigorodny raion became a part of North Ossetian territory the Soviet government sought to repopulate the area by resettling South Ossetians there. According to O’Loughlin, et al, the Soviet government established an *orgnabor*, an organized movement of mostly peasants to industrial enterprises for a fixed period of time. This *orgnabor* “brought an estimated 26,000 South Ossetians from Georgia into the region to fill the jobs, houses and settlements emptied of the deportees.”<sup>70</sup> According to Pavel Polian, the South Ossetians who resettled in the Prigorodny raion were given the land they worked after five years.<sup>71</sup> This made them permanent residents of the area, not merely seasonal workers who were willing to return to South Ossetia when the Ingush were allowed to return. In fact, according to O’Loughlin, et al, due to violent clashes that occurred when the deportees were allowed to return the Soviet government resettled a further 22,000 South Ossetians from 1956 to 1959 to discourage Ingush from resettling in the former residences.<sup>72</sup> The significance of these events is that South Ossetian refugees already had ethnic kin living in the Prigorodny raion and this could have been one of the reason so many of them settled there. According to Gearoid O Tuathail many South Ossetians retained strong bonds with their ethnic kin in North Ossetia and many had family members who had moved to Prigorodny raion as a part of the Stalinist *orgnabor* after the deportations.<sup>73</sup>

The North Ossetian Supreme Soviet passed a resolution in December, 1990 that prohibited the selling and purchasing of houses and other buildings as personal property. This

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<sup>70</sup> John O’Loughlin et al., “The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Eastern Prigorodnyy Rayon, North Ossetia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49:6 (2008): 644.

<sup>71</sup> Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2004), 72-73.

<sup>72</sup> John O’Loughlin et al., “The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Eastern Prigorodnyy Rayon, North Ossetia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49:6 (2008): 644.

<sup>73</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail, “Russia’s Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49:6 (2008): 674.

was an attempt to stop the Ingush from returning to the Prigorodny raion. With this resolution in effect and a sudden influx of refugees from South Ossetia, this could clearly give cause to the Ingush leadership to fight for the return of the Prigorodny raion. Again they were not permitted to move to the raion while at the same time refugees from South Ossetia were being resettled in Vladikavkaz and the Prigorodny raion. This influx of refugees could have created an urgency leading them to attempt to regain control of the region. It was almost history repeating, when they returned after the deportation they were not allowed to return to the Prigorodny raion while at the same time South Ossetians were brought in to live there. Although this time the South Ossetians were relocating under different circumstances, it could have the same outcome as before: the Ingush being denied what they saw as rightfully and historically theirs. Tishkov states that many of the South Ossetian refugees moved to the Prigorodny raion and then behaved hostilely towards the Ingush.<sup>74</sup> He goes on to say that many of the South Ossetian refugees used their “cultural kinship with the main population to lay a specific claim to rights in the Prigorodny raion and to provoke further anxiety within the Ingush community regarding the possible increase of ethnic ‘aliens.’”<sup>75</sup> O’Loughlin, et al, claim that, “Thousands of refugees spilled into Vladikavkaz and the Prigorodny, bringing with them powerful resentments.”<sup>76</sup>

In an interview with a *Pravda* correspondent, Akhsarbek Galazov, at that time Chairman of the North Ossetian SSR Supreme Soviet addressed the refugee problem his republic was facing due to the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia. He stated that the refugees were being housed in temporary housing such as boarding schools, dormitories, sanitoriums and

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<sup>74</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 163.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>76</sup> John O’Loughlin et al., “The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Eastern Prigorodnyy Rayon, North Ossetia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49:6 (2008): 648

preventative treatment facilities.<sup>77</sup> He went on to add that although many South Ossetians were asking for permanent housing in North Ossetia, they had been denied because there were no available apartments or empty land to build on.<sup>78</sup> The only number he uses when referring to how many refugees had turned up in North Ossetia is when he states, “In the past two days we have taken in 260 refugees, mainly women and children.”<sup>79</sup> This interview was given in January 1991 during the height of the fighting in South Ossetia so it is questionable that only 260 refugees would show up in two days.

With up to 100,000 refugees in North Ossetia is impossible that they were all housed in temporary housing, so the question remains, whether temporarily or permanently where were these refugees housed? Did the North Ossetian leadership resettle them in the Prigorodny raion to fortify the area with their co-ethnics to make it more difficult for the Ingush to claim the land? Tishkov claims, “It is not easy to determine whether the considerable number of refugees who found themselves in Prigorodny [...] landed there by choice or through special measures.”<sup>80</sup>

In an article published in the *Pravda* newspaper the Chairman of the South-North Ossetian National Movement claimed the North Ossetian leadership was trying to force the refugees to return to South Ossetia. He said, “The republic leadership simply wants to get rid of us, using various pretexts. In July and August [1991], women, children and old people were forcibly evicted from dormitories and guesthouses. The reason given was this: The refugees should return to South Ossetia. There’s no place like home, that’s very true. But a war is going

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<sup>77</sup> A. Grachov, “First Step Must Be Taken on Events in South Ossetia,” *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 3:43, (February 20, 1991): 30.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 163.



on in the South Ossetian Autonomous Province.”<sup>81</sup> This appears contrary to what several authors claim was actually happening, that the North Ossetian leadership were resettling these refugees in the Prigorodny raion.

According to Daniel J. Gerstle, a writer for Eurasianet who has researched the Ossetians, claims, “Following the South Ossetian separatists’ 1991-1992 war with Georgia, the Ossetian lobby in Russia first persuaded the Kremlin to shelter refugees from the conflict in the environs of Vladikavkaz, then to allow South Ossetians to enjoy a quasi-dual citizenship status which allows them to travel to and from Russia without visas.”<sup>82</sup> He goes on to say that after the fighting between the Ingush and Ossetians drove many Ingush from the Prigorodny raion, the North Ossetian authorities then resettled thousands of South Ossetian refugees in abandoned Ingush homes.<sup>83</sup> Tishkov states that although many individual houses belonging to Ingush were destroyed, apartment buildings were occupied by Ossetians, many of them refugees from the South.<sup>84</sup> Although the presence of the refugees heightened tensions, they were not the only ones who participated in or benefited from the expulsion of Ingush from the area. Some 800 apartments of Ingush who were driven out were subsequently occupied by Ossetians working for the republican police, the same police involved in driving the Ingush out.<sup>85</sup>

Whether the refugees landed in the Prigorodny raion as a political move on the part of the North Ossetian authorities or they went there because they had relatives does not change the fact that there a sudden influx of refugees into an already densely populated, highly contested area.

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<sup>81</sup> V. Shanayev, “We Investigate a Problem: No Longer in the Native Land, But Still Not a Foreign Land,” *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 38:43 (October 23, 1991): 29.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel J. Gerstle, “South Ossetia’s Vladikavkaz Connection,” Eurasianet, accessed at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eavl122706.shtml>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 180.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 180.

As stated earlier, the Russian government was aware of the destabilizing effect this refugee crisis could have in the northern Caucasus area. The Russian newspaper *Izvestia* reported that a statement released by Ruslan Khazbulatov, the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, viewed the influx of South Ossetian refugees as “creating preconditions in the region for a social explosion capable of destabilizing the situation throughout the North Caucasus.”<sup>86</sup> Ironically, the statement also defined the ousting of the South Ossetian from their “historical homeland” as genocide. This was basically echoed by the Ingush in their situation. They wanted the return of their “historical homeland” because they viewed this as necessary for their survival as a group.

In the summer of 1992 the situation was that there large numbers of South Ossetian refugees living in the Prigorodny raion. It is contested whether they were sent there to strengthen numbers of Ossetians as some authors claim, or if they settled there on their own. This sudden influx of refugees decreased the security in the area. According to the Russian newspaper *Moskovskiy Novosti* on June 9-10, 1992, a group comprised of mostly refugees in Vladikavkaz seized 12 self propelled guns and rifles and staged an attack that left several dead and wounded.<sup>87</sup> As a result of this incident a state of emergency was imposed in Vladikavkaz and this simply heightened security concerns leading up to the outbreak of the actual violence several months later.

As I stated earlier, a sudden influx of refugees can serve as a catalyst for initiating a violent conflict. In this case, the fact that refugees settled in a contested area increased tensions. It was not simply the presence of the refugees in North Ossetia; it was simply one piece of a

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<sup>86</sup> Ivan Yelistratov and Sergei Chugayev, “The Russian Parliament May Consider the Question of Annexation of South Ossetia by Russia,” *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 24:44 (July 15, 1992), 16.

<sup>87</sup> Mikhail Shevelev, “Epicenter: War Is Coming From the South. The Fate of Peace in Southern Russia Is Being Decided Today in Ossetia,” *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 25:44 (July 22, 1992), 6.

larger puzzle in understanding this conflict, just one of many layers. The fighting in South Ossetia caused refugees to stream into North Ossetia, many of them settled in the Prigorodny raion. This would not have been an issue had the Ingush not been promised the return of this land, and this would not have occurred had they not been deported and their land given away. So this is just one of many factors creating this conflict.

If the Prigorodny raion is such a densely populated and contested area, why did the Russian government promise to return it to the Ingush? This is the next factor that will be analyzed.

## The Soviet Union vs. Russia: The Power Struggle

To understand why these laws were passed we must first look at the greater context of what was occurring in the Soviet Union at that time. The period of 1989 to 1991 represented a power struggle that was occurring in the Russian Republic of the Soviet Union. There were two centers of power vying for control over the country and the ethno-territories that comprised Russia. The Soviet government, led by Mikhail Gorbachev and the Russian government, headed by Boris Yeltsin were engaged in a struggle to gain full leadership of the country. One aspect of this power struggle resulted in differing actions towards the ethno-territories, some arguing for sovereignty or outright independence, some wishing to remain a territory fully integrated into the Russian republic. The reactions of the two men at the top to these demands are important: were they simply attempting to resolve an issue with the best solution or were they attempting to gain support in their respective bids for power? I argue that in attempting to gain power and support they made decisions that had disastrous effects in some of the autonomous regions in the Soviet Union and then in Russia. Although these decisions were not made to incite tension in any of the republics they did just that, and this also shows the lack of understanding by the leadership of the delicate state of ethnic relations in the late Soviet and early Russian period. Perhaps one of the most disastrous being the “war of laws” that ensued between the Soviet government (Gorbachev) and the Russian government (Yeltsin.) These laws gave the Ingush a legal right to demand to the return of the contested regions, which was one of the major factors in why the conflict took place.

It is widely accepted that Gorbachev and Yeltsin recognized the ethnic factor in their bid for power. Gorbachev had not only the regions within Russia to contend with, he was also dealing with independence movements in the union republics. While Gorbachev was attempting

to keep the USSR together he was also promoting the idea of sovereignty among the ethnic territories of Russia in an attempt to weaken Yeltsin's power, pushing for them to gain equal status with Union republics. This way if Yeltsin's government declared independence the autonomous regions within Russia would also have the right to declare independence from Russia if they were recognized as Union republics. Yeltsin was also encouraging the ethnic territories to declare sovereignty but this was to gain popularity in the upcoming presidential election. He clearly stated that they would not have to right to secede from the Russian Federation.

The fact that Gorbachev did not have a clear understanding of the nationalities issue is agreed upon by most scholars on the subject. Robert Kaiser argues that Gorbachev was too committed to being a communist to allow the dismantling of the country. Gorbachev understood the need for reforming the government but when republics started pushing for sovereignty and independence he pulled the reins of his reform, hoping to halt the movement towards outright independence. "Gorbachev's insistence on trying to preserve his communism ultimately undermined his position in the country."<sup>88</sup> He claims that when the country started to fall apart, literally, Gorbachev became one of the apparatchiks he had been struggling against and could not adjust to a country that had turned against him.<sup>89</sup> He argues that Gorbachev didn't understand the full scope of the nationalities issue until five years into his tenure, then his reforms had already led to greater national sentiment and then to demands for independence. Faced with this veritable Pandora's Box he resorted to force to attempt to hold the country together.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Kaiser, "Gorbachev: Triumph and Failure," *Foreign Affairs* 70:2 (Spring, 1991): 164.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

Anders Aslund states that Gorbachev's lack of understanding of the nationality issue led him to the problems he eventually faced. He says, "Gorbachev was simply dumbfounded when one nationality after another demanded attention."<sup>91</sup> He also says that Gorbachev was attempting to keep the union together however necessary, even by the use of force. He says that Gorbachev's "delaying tactics caused a severe aggravation of all the nationality issues."<sup>92</sup>

John Dunlop is in agreement on Gorbachev's unrealistic view of the nationalities issue facing him stating, "From the time of his accession in 1985, Gorbachev had repeatedly shown himself to be blind and insensitive to ethnic issues."<sup>93</sup> In 1990 when Yeltsin had gained power as the leader of the Russian Republic and declared sovereignty only then did Gorbachev begin to encourage autonomous regions in the Russian Republic to declare their sovereignty from the Russian government. Dunlop states he failed at this attempt to fracture Russia just as he failed to keep the USSR together as a cohesive state.<sup>94</sup>

Dunlop states that Yeltsin was accommodating to the minorities in Russia. Yeltsin allowed the autonomous territories in Russia to take as much sovereignty as they wanted, but he underlined the fact that they would be responsible for the well-being of their people and that in no way would they be allowed independence. They would have to remain a part of Russia. By giving these regions a fair amount of autonomy he gained much support from the minorities.<sup>95</sup>

Jeremy Smith says that Yeltsin, among others who had advocated sovereignty in the republics were suddenly worried about Russia facing the same crisis that the Soviet Union had

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<sup>91</sup> Anders Aslund, "Russia's Road from Communism," *Daedalus* vol. 121 No. 2 (Spring 1992): 78.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>93</sup> John B. Dunlop, "Russia: Confronting a Loss of Empire, 1987-1991," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 108, No. 4 (Winter 1993-1994): 609.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 612.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 615.

faced. They were afraid that claims of sovereignty would turn into calls for independence. To remedy this Yeltsin had the autonomous republics, all but Tatarstan and Chechnya, sign a Federal Treaty on March 31, 1992, which would ensure the unity of the Russian Federation.<sup>96</sup>

Alexander Moytl claims, “Gorbachev has purposely been mouthing platitudes in order to avoid dealing with the Pandora’s Box of ethnicity.”<sup>97</sup> He goes on to say that Gorbachev’s avoidance of the issue was basically his avoidance of an issue that could seriously hinder his reforms.<sup>98</sup>

Valery Tishkov is in agreement on the issue of Gorbachev and the nationalities. He states, “The ethnic policy of the perestroika period proved a failure, exploited by Gorbachev’s opponents in Moscow and by opponents of Moscow in the Periphery as the main argument to abolish the Soviet Union.”<sup>99</sup> Yet Gorbachev also exploited the nationalities issue to his advantage. In Yeltsin’s bid for presidency he made many promises to the ethnic territories of Russia promising anything from unlimited sovereignty to the return of pre-deportation boundaries. During this same time Gorbachev encouraged the autonomous regions of Russia to declare sovereignty and to push for equal rights with the Union republics. Tishkov states Gorbachev’s reason for this was, “It could weaken the exclusive rights of Union republic leaders to define a new state structure for the country.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jeremy Smith, “Russia’s Minorities and the Soviet Legacy,” in *The Fall of an Empire, the Birth of a Nation*, ed. Chris J. Chulos and Timo Piirainen (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), 210.

<sup>97</sup> Alexander Moytl, “The Sobering of Gorbachev: Nationality, Restructuring, and the West,” *The Soviet Nationality Reader, The Disintegration in Context*, ed. Rachel Denber (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 583.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 583.

<sup>99</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 49.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

These many examples simply show that both Gorbachev and Yeltsin employed manipulation of the nationalities issue for their advantage. Each leader had different goals and each leader showed that they lacked a true understanding of the volatility of the nationalities issue. They used the nationality card when it was convenient for them: Yeltsin to gain votes in an election and Gorbachev to undermine Yeltsin's power. Ingushetia was one region that was directly affected by this power struggle. In the midst of this power struggle a "war of laws" broke out between the Soviet and Russian governments pertaining to those groups deported under Stalin.

The war of laws led to an increase in tensions between the Ingush and the Ossetians. The Ingush believed the Prigorodny raion would be returned to them and the Ossetians were adamantly opposed to this and refused to give up administrative control over it. First we will look at the events that led up to the war of laws and how this became an issue on the national stage in the Soviet Union. The Ingush national movement which began with the Congress of Ingush people in 1988 demanded the return of the Prigorodny raion. In 1989 Kh. A. Fargiyev, a deputy in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies brought the issue of creating an Ingush Republic before the Congress. In his presentation he asked for full legal rehabilitation of the deported peoples and also stated that without the creation of an autonomous Ingush Republic the Ingush believed that their further cultural, political and economic development was impossible.<sup>101</sup>

In response the Soviet government passed a law recognizing the wrongs committed under Stalin. It called the acts criminal and denounced them, but made no mention of returning the land. The law stated,

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<sup>101</sup> "The Congress of USSR People's Deputies, Verbatim Report," *Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 24:41 (July 12, 1989): 17.



“The deportation of the Balkars, Ingush, Kalmyks, Karachai, Crimean Tatars, Germans, Meskhetians, and Chechens from their home territories during the second world war can be regarded as barbarous actions. The USSR Supreme Soviet unreservedly condemns the forced deportations of whole peoples and regards it as the gravest crime which contradicts the fundamentals of international law and humanistic nature of a socialist society. The USSR Supreme Soviet considers it necessary to enact the necessary legislation in order to restore the rights of all Soviet peoples subjected to repression.”<sup>102</sup>

Fearing that large numbers of Ingush would attempt to return to the contested area, the North Ossetian government passed a law that restricted the buying and selling of homes and private property. This was to stop the Ingush from moving to the area.

The Ingush were not satisfied with the law as it was, they still demanded the return of the region. In March 1991, there convened a Congress of Ingush People which issued a proclamation seeking the restoration of their homeland. That same month in the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* reported that Yeltsin and the “democrats” held a highly unstable position in the autonomous units.<sup>103</sup> This is important because at the time Yeltsin was campaigning for president of the Russian republic and he needed the support of the autonomous regions. One way to gain the support would be to listen to their grievances and make promises to take action. At a rally Yeltsin promised the Ingush that the question of restoring the Ingush autonomous unit and the pre deportation borders would be discussed in the Russian Supreme Soviet while at the same time promising the North Ossetians that the existing administrative

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<sup>102</sup> Nikolai Bougai, *The Deportation of the Repressed Peoples in the Soviet Union* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996), 206-207.

<sup>103</sup> Olga Vasilyeva, “Yeltsin’s Visit to the Caucasus: Trip by a Dilettante?” *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 12:43 (April 24, 1991): 20.

borders would be preserved.<sup>104</sup> Many politicians make empty promises, but Yeltsin actually acted on one of his promises, that one to the Ingush.

The next month the Supreme Council of Russia passed a law entitled, “On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.” Article three of the law states, “The rehabilitation of repressed peoples signifies that the admission and implementation of their rights to restoration of territorial integrity as it existed before the anti-constitutional policy of forces reassignment of borders.”<sup>105</sup> This in no uncertain terms states the Ingush should be allowed to reclaim control over the Prigorodny raion.

The Ossetians disagree with this law calling it unconstitutional. The North Ossetian leadership argued that articles 67 and 102 of the constitution of the Russian Federation claim that borders between subjects can only be changed according to mutual agreement, not simply due to the will of one side. The Ingush could now use the law On the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples to claim territorial integrity and the North Ossetians could claim the same using the articles in the constitution. This is exactly what happened: each side stated they had the legal right to the Prigorodny raion, they simply cited different laws to justify their claims.

If the Russian government had not passed the law on the return to pre-deportation borders the Ingush would not have had a legal claim to this land. This is not to say that there would not have been a conflict, but it merely gave the Ingush legal backing in their fight for the Prigorodny raion. Even before they gained the legal rights to the land, the Ingush ran an ad in an Ossetian newspaper calling for the return of it. Their added stated,

“There are only 300,000 of us on this planet and one-third of our people cannot return home. We have exhausted all parliamentary methods of campaigning. The

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>105</sup> Law On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples

Kremlin is deaf. It has dished up land belonging to other peoples to its darlings [the Ossetians] and has now come up with the theory that frontiers cannot be redrawn...We are shown infinite patience...The center is silent...The Supreme Soviet of the North Ossetian ASSR declares its sovereignty on our land. This lawlessness angers us. Over centuries Ossetia has grown rich by accumulating our property. A whole generation of them walked on other people's land, drank other people's water, ate other people's bread, lived in other people's houses, and slept in other people's beds."<sup>106</sup>

The Ossetian authorities responded to this by claiming territorial integrity, this coupled with the influx of refugees meant that the Ossetians would not willingly return control of the land to the Ingush. Realizing after the fact the full ramifications of the passage of this law, the Russian government imposed a three year moratorium on border changes in hopes of finding an alternative solution to the issue.

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<sup>106</sup> Quoted in: Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800-2000* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2001), 132.

## Conclusion

Every conflict truly is unique, after one has taken place it can be dissected and the causal factors identified, the actors identified and often the actions that led up to the conflict.

Attempting to pinpoint exactly which factors will lead to a conflict is nearly impossible.

Scholars have found certain factors that are present in many conflicts, but at the same time the presence of those factors does not mean a conflict will occur.

I have attempted to show the four major factors that I argue were factors in the creation of this conflict. It is impossible to know whether there would have been a conflict had any of them been missing. It can be argued that there may not have been a conflict had any one of them not been present just as it can be argued the conflict still would have occurred even in the absence of one or more of the factors.

This section is hypothetical, but it shows the importance of each of the four factors I have identified. The first factor I will consider is the border policies and deportations under Stalin. The border changes that were made under Stalin took the capital of Vladikavkaz and gave it exclusively to the North Ossetians. Then with the deportations more land was given to the North Ossetians and not returned to the Ingush after their rehabilitation and return. This would be the foundation for the conflict. In fact there were protests and rallies held as far back as the 1970's and early 1980's by the Ingush for the return of the Prigorodny raion. Had the Ingush not been deported and allowed to keep what they see as their 'historical homeland' the conflict possibly could have been avoided.

However, this piece of land is one of the most fertile in region so we can't assume there may not have been a conflict of another nature. Had there been an influx of Ossetians settling in

this area perhaps the Ossetians would be protesting for their right to the land. They also claim that the region is their ‘historical homeland.’

The next factor I have identified is the Chechen declaration of independence from Russia which left the Ingush without a republic. The way the Soviets drew the borders was to give major ethnic groups their own territory with their name. Although the Ingush could have remained on the land where they lived and simply been an administrative region of Russia, the Soviet policies made having an ethnic territory seem necessary for each major ethnic group. When the Ingush were left without a republic, they sought to form the Republic of Ingushetia. The major problem they were facing was they had no administrative capital and all of the major industry was in either Chechnya or North Ossetia. The one way to gain a capital and industry was to regain the land they lost after the deportations: the Prigorodny raion including the right bank of Vladikavkaz which could serve as their capital.

Had Chechnya not declared independence and remained a part of Russia, the need for an Ingush capital and access to industry would not have been a pressing issue. It could have been possible to put the Prigorodny raion under federal administration and allow Ossetians and Ingush to live there without either of them having administrative control over the region. Yet this would not have been an issue had the territory not been taken away from the Ingush in 1944. Each of these four factors builds on one another to create the volatile situation that emerged in 1992.

The South Ossetian refugee factor could be seen as a catalyst in the conflict. The sudden settlement of thousands of Ossetians on what the Ingush viewed as their land made the return of that land even more urgent. As I stated before, the Ingush witnessed the movement of 22,000 South Ossetians to the region between 1956 and 1959 to take over their land. They were witnessing the same thing over again.

The South Ossetian factor can also be traced back to Soviet border policies. The border of the Georgian Republic was drawn so that it included the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. These tactics have been called the Soviet policy of ‘divide and conquer’ to diminish the possibility of ethnic groups uniting and rising up against the center. Had South Ossetia remained a part of Russia there would not have been a refugee crisis that created the urgency for the return of the Prigorodny raion to the Ingush.

The last factor I have identified is the power struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin and the laws each of their governments adopted. When the Soviet government passed the law calling Stalin’s actions criminal, it did not address the issue of the return to pre-deportation borders as many of the deportees wished. Yeltsin then saw an opportunity to gain support for his government and also for his bid in the presidential election by passing a law granting the return to former borders. What he did not realize is that the promises he made and the law his government passed had far reaching effects. In an article in *Izvestia* one scholar called the passage of this law, “an example of political dilettantism and irresponsibility.”<sup>107</sup> The most irresponsible part of law was that it provided no solution as to how to redraw the borders and what to do with the people who were living there, many had been there since they were resettled in 1944.

Emil Pain, who authored the *Izvestia* article above and at the time was the Director of the Center for Ethnopolitical Studies, says he warned the parliamentarians about the legal consequences of adopting this law but states, “the Russian Deputies wanted very much to portray themselves as bigger ‘democrats’ than their colleagues in the Union parliament, who had just

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<sup>107</sup> Emil Pain and Arkady Popov, “The Flames of War in the Caucasus Are Retribution for Legal and Political Mistakes,” *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 44:44 (December 2, 1992): 19.

adopted a Declaration on Restoring Rights of Deported Peoples that had no article on their territorial rehabilitation.”<sup>108</sup>

The situation Ingushetia faced at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union was bleak. They were being forced out of the republic they shared with the Chechens and the only thing they were asking for, as they had been since 1957, was the return of the Prigorodny raion and the right bank of Vladikavkaz to create an Ingush homeland. In 1991, they were given a glimmer of hope with the Russian government made legal promises to them for the return of this land. At the same time they witnessed this land being settled by more Ossetians that were fleeing the war in South Ossetia. All of the factors created a situation that ended in a brief, but violent conflict that drove thousands of Ingush from their homes, some of whom still today have not been allowed to return. “[T]he acceleration of armed conflicts in the Caucasus would not have been so avalanche-like had they been a function of objective preconditions. But after all, every one of them, including the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, was also a consequence of glaring political miscalculations, and sometimes even malicious intent.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 19.

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